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WEEKLY REPORT**THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM**

State Department review
completed
OSD review(s)
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27 January 1965

**INTELLIGENCE AND REPORTING SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE INTERAGENCY
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THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

(21-27 January 1965)

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THE WEEK IN PERSPECTIVE

The military's bloodless coup de force against the Huong regime yesterday has removed the target for what had become increasingly violent Buddhist-inspired agitation. General Khanh, however, is likely to encounter a host of problems in his attempt to revamp the government. The Buddhist leadership, having once again demonstrated its political power, is unlikely to refrain from exercising it. US leverage on the Vietnamese situation has been further reduced.

The military has entrusted to General Khanh responsibility for establishment of a joint civilian-military council, which will in turn name a new chief of state. The new chief of state will then name a new premier. The council will act as the legislative body pending election of a national assembly, still scheduled for mid-March.

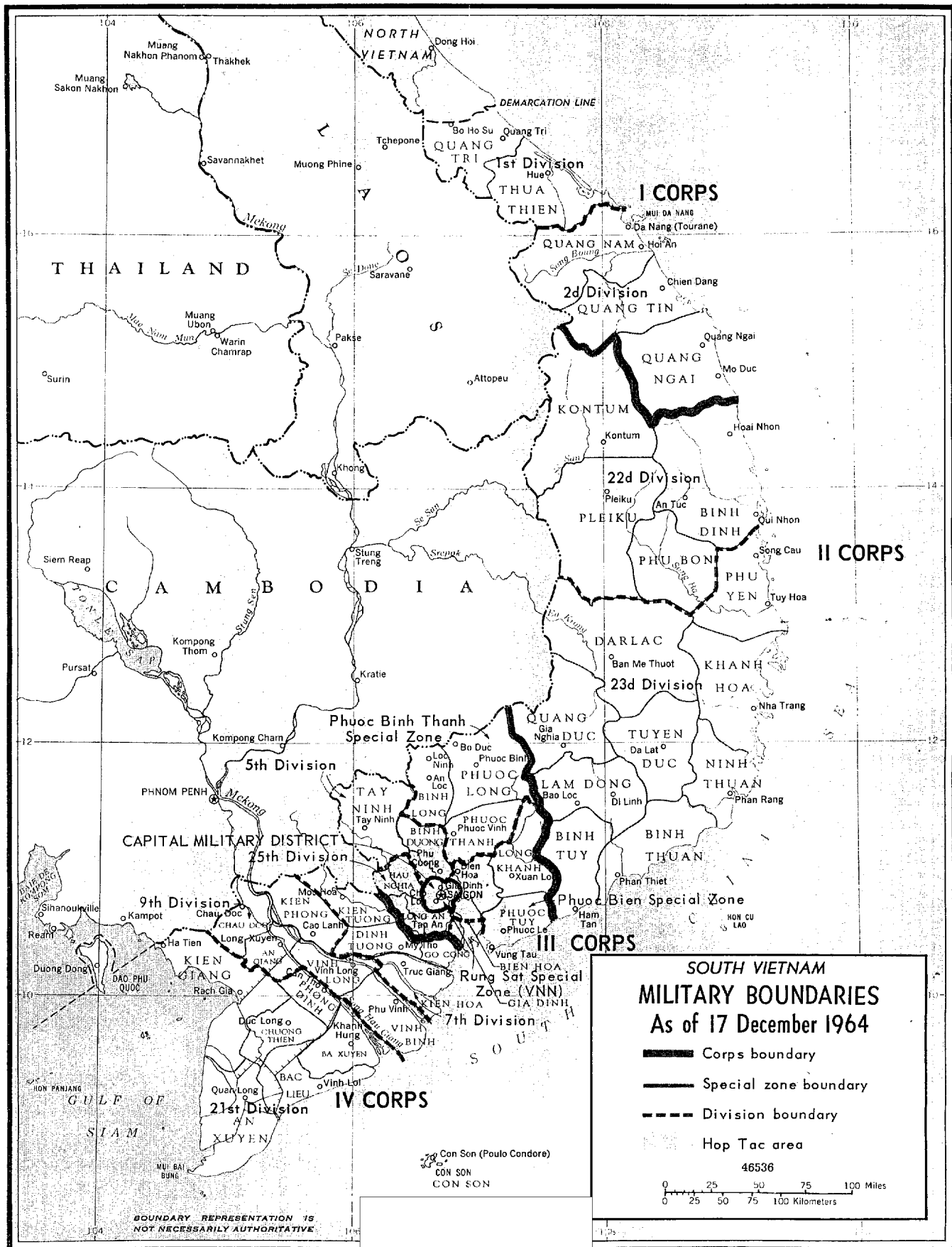
Phan Khac Suu will remain as acting chief of state, and may well be reelected to the post following establishment of the new council. Deputy Premier Vien will serve as acting premier pending designation of a new premier. Khanh professes an intent to leave the balance of the cabinet pretty much unchanged for the present, but some ministers, who have previously been under Buddhist attack, will almost certainly be replaced.

The projected new council, which will include religious elements, is likely to become the new focus for the exertion of Buddhist pressure, as well as for the interplay of those other contending political forces which have thus far prevented establishment of a viable regime. Agreement on a new government combination may thus be difficult of achievement.

Huong's overthrow came about through a "marriage of convenience" between Khanh and the Buddhists. Although Khanh obtained the support of the Armed Forces Council for his plans, he is reported to have met with considerable

opposition. Continuing divisions within the military can be expected to limit the degree to which Khanh can enhance his personal power position following yesterday's takeover.

If Viet Cong inactivity has in fact been the occasion for regrouping and consolidation, then the Viet Cong should be in a better position to mount several large-scale attacks, including seizure of one or more district capitals. These attacks could possibly occur in the period immediately preceding Tet, when moonless nights will favor the attackers. Recent ARVN successes are somewhat encouraging but will have to be sustained in order to effect a reduction of Viet Cong military capabilities.



I. SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

A. POLITICAL SITUATION

1. General Khanh, with the support of at least some of the other generals, on the morning of 27 January overthrew the Huong government by announcing that the military, who had handed over power to civilians last October, had withdrawn their confidence. The military's bloodless coup de force was rationalized on the grounds that Huong had been unable to cope with the danger from rising Buddhist protests.

A communique in the name of the Armed Forces Council stated that General Khanh had been entrusted with the task of resolving the political crisis, and would immediately convene a joint military-civilian council to "advise" the new government on major decisions. Khanh told Deputy Ambassador Johnson that the proposed new council, with representatives of the country's major religions and regions, would in effect replace the High National Council which the military dissolved on 20 December. The council, in accordance with the existing provisional charter, would name a chief of state to appoint a new premier, and would act as a legislature until a national congress is convened.

Khanh indicated that he would name the new council within the next seven days. He expects Phan Khac Suu to be redesignated Chief of State; Khanh claimed that the only condition Suu had attached to acceptance was that elections for a national assembly be held in March as previously stipulated. The Armed Forces Council has accepted Suu's condition, according to Khanh.

First Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Vien has agreed to be acting premier until the chief of state appoints Huong's successor. Khanh indicated to Johnson that ministerial changes will be kept to a minimum and that the military who hold cabinet posts will retain them.

2. Ambassador Johnson's subsequent talks with Suu and Huong on 27 January confirmed that both Suu

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[redacted]

and Huong were not disposed to oppose Khanh's moves and that Suu had agreed to remain in a caretaker status at least until a new Chief of State was selected. Suu wished to wait and see "what kind of a government" would emerge before accepting reelection as Chief of State. Both Huong and Suu, as well as Vien, advised the US also to "wait and see" what develops, expressing concern nonetheless with the apparent alliance between Khanh and the Buddhists and with the course that future developments might take. [redacted]

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3. Khanh's seeming reassumption of power climaxed a week of rapidly rising tension stemming from the confrontation of the Buddhist hierarchy with Huong. Five leading monks, including Tri Quang and Tam Chau, went on a hunger strike, and again demonstrated their power in the streets by stimulating demonstrations and disorders in Saigon and such central Vietnamese cities as Hue, Da Nang, Nha Trang, and Quang Tri. A 17-year-old girl burned herself to death in Nha Trang on 26 January, the first politically inspired self-immolation since the Buddhist protest movement against Diem in 1963. Deliberate resort to anti-US slogans and demonstrations was also employed. The complaisance of military commanders in Central Vietnam--particularly General Thi, the I Corps commander, and General Chuan, 1st Division commander in Hue--toward mounting unrest suggests at the least sympathy with the anti-Huong movement and perhaps even complicity in a Khanh-Buddhist plot to set the stage for the events of 27 January.

4. Khanh's move is the culmination of more than a month of maneuvering to return to power with Buddhist support. Tri Quang has claimed that just prior to the dissolution of the High National Council last month, Khanh approached him with an offer to mount a coup against Huong. Khanh last weekend claimed to Ambassador Johnson that Buddhist leaders had agreed in writing to give full support to a military takeover for at least two years, as well as to abstain from politics and to dissolve their chaplain corps. He stated further that Tri Quang and Ho Giac, another militant Buddhist, had agreed orally to leave the country. [redacted]

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[redacted]

General Dong, the martial law commander in Saigon, on 27 January referred publicly to an alleged promise of Quang, Giac, and Tam Chau to leave the country. However, two representatives of the Armed Forces Council are reported to have been unsuccessful in getting the Buddhist leaders to reconfirm their supposed agreement immediately prior to the Wednesday military takeover. The monks refused to countersign the agreement on the grounds that the Buddhist Institute is a religious organization not engaged in politics. [redacted]

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The Buddhist leadership has ordered a stand-down on demonstrations. The five monks have ended their hunger strike, having achieved Huong's overthrow and having once again shown Buddhist political power, at least in the negative sense.

5. Reporting over the past week indicated that the military was far from united with respect to the overthrow of Huong. There was even some indication of a possible preemptive coup by elements inimical to Khanh personally and concerned over his alliance with the Buddhists. [redacted]

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While Khanh in the end achieved enough of a consensus to go ahead with his power plan, continuing divisions within the military may limit the degree to which he can now consolidate his position and will add to his difficulties in coming up with a new government combination sufficiently acceptable to the disparate political, military, and religious groups which have thus far prevented achievement of political stability. Buddhist leaders, for example, have in the past declared themselves opposed to military rule, and extremely distrustful of General Khanh.

6. Two incidents of suspected Viet Cong terrorism against US personnel were reported during the past week. Four American soldiers were murdered while on a fishing trip near the central Vietnamese city of Qui Nhon, about 270 miles northeast of Saigon. On 26 January, two terrorist time bombs exploded inside MACV's secondary headquarters (formerly the MAAG compound) in Saigon, injuring one Army officer but causing little property damage. Two Vietnamese

[REDACTED]

electricians who have been apprehended, are suspected of having planted the bombs.

Economic Developments

7. Retail prices of rice have moved up again, and the wholesale price remained well above the official rate, due primarily to temporary short supply. The shortage should be relieved, security conditions permitting, in the next few weeks when the ramasseurs can begin heavy shipments following the release of bank credits held up pending GVN settlement for last year's deliveries.

8. Consumer price indices for December rose two points, primarily in reflection of higher rice prices. The January index is expected to show a similar increase. The shopping and the repayment of debts which precedes Tet may be a factor in the increases, but the rising price level may also reflect a basic nervousness in business circles caused by political uncertainty.

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B. MILITARY SITUATION

1. The level and intensity of Communist activity declined to the lowest point since late February. Despite the decline there were several appearances of Viet Cong main force units which either sought open engagement or occupied friendly villages with a determination to stay until the ARVN produced enough combat power to cause them to withdraw. Low-level reports continue to be received that the Viet Cong may attempt to seize and hold one or more district capitals according to COMUSMACV.

The two-day occupation of a hamlet and the attack on two paramilitary companies in Binh Tuy Province on 17 January, by an estimated Viet Cong battalion, led to a major ARVN reaction operation. In the initial phase, friendly casualties were heavy (22 KIA including 2 US, 30 WIA, 40 MIA and 72 weapons lost); no Viet Cong losses were reported. The ARVN reaction force then reoccupied the village with little contact with the enemy, who had withdrawn. The capture of the village appeared to be a tactic to ambush government relief forces, as at Binh Gia. When the ARVN reacted in strength rather than in detail, the planned ambush was abandoned.

Activities initiated by the Viet Cong last week were of a relatively minor nature. The Communists interdicted National Highway 1 in Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh Provinces; elsewhere, Communist sabotage efforts did not seriously disrupt traffic on the main roads.

The low intensity of Viet Cong activity during the reporting period, coupled with the fact that ARVN units made contact with large Viet Cong concentrations, suggests that the Communists may be preparing to launch several large-scale attacks prior to Tet, or to intensify their general activities after the holiday period. ARVN's success in inflicting heavy casualties on the Communists may have prevented the Viet Cong from launching some planned attacks.

Two Chinese Communist copies of the Soviet SKS 7.62-mm semiautomatic carbine were captured

recently in Kontum Province, and one round of Chinese-manufactured 7.62-mm ammunition of the type peculiar to this weapon was recovered in Phuoc Tuy Province. This marks the first appearance of these weapons in a Viet Cong unit outside of IV Corps. The Viet Cong may be gradually equipping some main force units with these weapons, perhaps in an attempt to effect standardization among the Viet Cong regular forces.

2. Despite the decrease in the number of large-scale ARVN-initiated operations last week, the number of successful actions was greater.

There were five ARVN-initiated engagements last week which resulted in significant Viet Cong losses. These operations, in Tay Ninh, Quang Tin, Hau Nghia, Kien Hoa, and Bac Lieu provinces, accounted for 226 Viet Cong killed, 128 captured, 80 weapons and quantities of ammunition recovered, and a large number of Viet Cong suspects. Government losses totalled 29 killed, 75 wounded, 3 missing and only 9 weapons.

In addition to these five engagements, on 25 January ARVN partially avenged the defeat suffered at Ap Bac two years ago at the hands of the 261st Viet Cong battalion. A search-and-destroy operation cornered the 261st and gave it a resounding defeat. Viet Cong losses reportedly were 153 killed (body count) and at least 5 heavy weapons. Many more individual weapons were captured but have not been counted. Government losses were 11 killed and 48 wounded (including 1 US). One armored personnel carrier and one helicopter were destroyed during the battle.

Battles such as these should serve as a welcome tonic for the victory-starved South Vietnamese Army. The impact of these few successes will be lost, however, without continuing and relentless pressure against the Viet Cong. It appears that the Viet Cong, in attempting to concentrate large forces, are making themselves more vulnerable to ARVN's superior fire power. It is likely, therefore, that the Viet Cong will continue to place primary emphasis on actions of smaller scale.

3. Losses for both sides increased this week due to increased and relatively successful ARVN operational activity. Government personnel casualties increased to 806 (201 KIA) compared to the previous week's total of 494 (146 KIA). Viet Cong casualties rose sharply to 742 (546 KIA) from 512 (426 KIA). Government weapon losses rose to 346 from 258 of the previous week. The number of weapons captured from the Viet Cong declined slightly to 190 from 200.

C. PACIFICATION

1. During the past week, there were no signs of significant forward movement in the nationwide pacification effort. Achievements continue to vary widely from area to area.

2. In I Corps area, operations to implement the 1965 pacification plan have begun in several provinces. In Quang Ngai Province, a pilot operation initiated in the Tu Nghia district, in which the province capital is located, has been adopted by all of the other districts of the provinces. The Viet Cong are already starting a counter-propaganda effort, suggesting that the plan itself has initial promise.

Around Da Nang city, in the province of Quang Nam, the area of GVN control is reportedly increasing steadily. Here, population and resources control measures also are showing some signs of improvement as cooperation between military forces and police units increases.

3. A reported expansion of GVN control in II Corps is being attributed to an improvement in the attitudes of key personnel toward the pacification effort and the rapid reaction of government forces to Viet Cong pressures. Highway 19, which dissects Binh Dinh Province from east to west and continues to the city of Pleiku, now is reported to be open and clear within the borders of the province. Twenty-two pacification teams at work in Binh Dinh are reported to be doing satisfactory work.

Despite claimed successes in some parts of the Corps area, however, there are other areas where there are definite signs of deterioration in the security situation. In Phu Bon Province, for example, the Viet Cong attacked two hamlets and burned some 76 homes. While these were the first hamlet burnings in this province in some six months, it is significant that they were apparently unopposed.

4. Limited progress in the pacification program is reported from III Corp zone outside of the Hop Tac effort, reported separately below. Bombing and defoliation operations have been initiated against Boi Loi forest in the southeastern part of Tay Ninh Province, a long-time Viet Cong stronghold. This operation, combined with a large relocation program, is designed to eliminate the Viet Cong threat to the pacification effort in Tay Ninh, and parts of Binh Duong and Hau Nghia provinces. The RVNAF high command is planning and controlling this operation, which is also supported by psychological warfare and civil action programs.

5. In the IV Corps area no advances in the pacification effort are reported. The only positive note may be certain personnel changes in the command structure of the unit assigned to An Xuyen Province.

6. In the Hop Tac area, conditions were reported by Hop Tac commander General Tam to be generally favorable, especially in the Capital Military District and the Rung Sat Special Zone. Viet Cong activity in areas peripheral to the Hop Tac zone have subsided. This should help to improve the morale of lower-level pacification workers who were reported to be slowing down their efforts out of fear that the government would not be able to protect them. Viet Cong activity in the Hop Tac area was relatively low, and there was a decrease of GVN small-unit activity.

Hop Tac Operations Plan 2 was issued on 19 January. It calls for subordinate units to submit implementing plans to the Hop Tac Council by 1 February. The date of execution will be established after this review is completed.

The Hop Tac Council is starting to give increased attention to the development phase of pacification, including techniques for, and support of, village and hamlet pacification activities. This apparently represents a change from those discussions which have heretofore dwelt more on immediate operational problems. At the same time, according to General Tam, more and better small unit actions are needed, together with more vigorous command emphasis to implement such operations.



Psychological operations and the exploitation of informational media are improving. Psychological warfare teams and civic action teams have been redeployed to provide more effective support to Hop Tac. More posters dealing with the resources and population control program are being distributed in what is apparently an attempt to explain this program to the people.



II. THIRD COUNTRY DEVELOPMENTS

A. CAMBODIA

1. The preparatory conference for the Indo-chinese People's Conference, originally scheduled for the first week of February, has been reset for 14 or 15 February. It appears that Prince Sihanouk, who originally proposed the meetings as a device to demonstrate alleged support for the neutralization of the Indochinese countries and for a negotiated settlement in South Vietnam, may be disquieted by the inadequacy of non-Communist responses to his initiative.

2. Sihanouk has entered a hospital for a physical checkup and, although he has been released again, is reportedly suffering from overwork. His physicians are requiring him to undergo protracted medical treatment which will require intermittent hospitalization over the coming months. The illness could be "diplomatic."

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3. The Cambodian border has remained relatively quiet during the past week. Cambodia has, however, reported two incidents involving casualties, on 13 and 16 January. In the first, a Vietnamese was reportedly killed. In the second, the RKG claims, a Cambodian peasant woman was killed by ARVN fire across the border. MACV acknowledges that a woman was killed but says her body was found on Vietnamese territory. MACV denies the other incident.

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4. On 27 January, the South Vietnamese foreign minister issued a vigorously-worded statement denouncing a Cambodian military tribunal for having sentenced to death on 26 December a Vietnamese soldier who was captured last May during a border incident. Various international bodies were asked to intervene. The fact that this protest was issued the same day that Khanh took back control, coupled with assertions by Chief of Staff Brig. Gen. Pham Van Dong that he intended to push for full support of the Khmer Serei, may suggest that Khmer Serei intends to renew an aggressive GVN approach toward Cambodia.

B. SOUTH KOREA

1. The Republic of Korea national assembly on 26 January voted 106-11, with eight abstentions, to send 2,000 logistic support troops to South Vietnam. Another 26 legislators of varying party affiliation were absent, and 23 opposition party members walked out in protest.

The Civil Rule Party, one of the two opposition parties in the national assembly, said it opposed sending troops to South Vietnam because of current and future unfavorable international reactions and the danger to Korean security which might result from absence of these troops. The other opposition element, the Democratic Party, complained several days prior to the vote that the measure was being adopted without enough consideration of its long-term implications.

III. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE BLOC

A. BLOC REACTION TO SAIGON COUP

Moscow, Peiping and Hanoi all reacted quickly and with a common theme to the Saigon coup. TASS said General Khanh's effort to retrieve a rapidly deteriorating situation would soon be "brushed aside" by an angry population. NCNA attributed the coup to the "military victories and political struggles of the South Vietnamese people," and VNA chalked it up to the "sharpening...contradictions between civilian and military groups and between the US aggressors and their lackeys."

B. HANOI-PEIPING RELATIONS

Recent London press reports of differences between the Chinese Communists and the North Vietnamese over the question of accelerating the war in South Vietnam appear to be based on speculation by local East European Communists. The allegations are not consistent with North Vietnam's approach to the war in the south, either in its propaganda--which predicates final victory on a long struggle--or in its conduct of the war, which appears designed to avoid an escalation that would bring the full force of US military power into Vietnam. The report also tends to give too much emphasis to Peiping's role in the direction of the war in South Vietnam, and to underestimate the control which Hanoi already exercises over the pace and timing of the insurgency.

C. HANOI-MOSCOW RELATIONS

A Soviet economic delegation arrived in Hanoi on 25 January "to study the implementation of the existing long-term economic agreements between the two governments," according to a North Vietnamese press account. The delegation, headed by a Vice Chairman of the Soviet State Committee for Economic Relations with Foreign Countries, is the first Soviet economic aid delegation to North Vietnam in years. It is

the latest of several recent indications that Hanoi and Moscow are feeling their way toward somewhat closer relations than they have had during the past two years. Further information on the activities of the mission will be necessary before its tasks and degree of success can be judged.

ANNEX

GO CONG PROVINCE

The government pacification effort in Go Cong Province is showing tangible signs of progress, according to a 31 December report from the Province Reporting Unit of the US Mission. The pacification effort has been gaining ground slowly, and the government's apparent success has not been seriously challenged by the quiescent Viet Cong.

There are an estimated 1,020 Viet Cong in the province--about 600 are guerrillas, about 270 are in two local force companies, and the rest are elements of a Dinh Tuong provincial battalion which operates in Go Cong. No main force Viet Cong units are known to be based in the province.

The Communists have two safe areas. One is a mangrove swamp in a narrow northeastern strip of Chau Thanh district, bordering on the mouth of the Saigon river; the other, also a swamp area, occupies the eastern half of Lao Loi Quan island which forms the southern part of the province. A long-established Viet Cong weapons factory in this latter area now is believed to have moved south to Kien Hoa Province, although a training area is still maintained. Viet Cong activity in Go Cong has declined sharply from its high point in September 1964, when 122 incidents occurred.

Government regular forces in Go Cong number about 1,560. These include 1,360 in two battalions and a headquarters company of the 12th Infantry Regiment, two platoons of artillery, and a small engineering unit. One of the significant indicators of a firmer government position in the province has been its ability to recruit successfully for both the regular and paramilitary forces.

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Regional Forces in Go Cong numbered more than 1,000 on 30 November, including new and untrained recruits, as compared to some 320 in three rifle companies in operational status (two in pacification areas and one in Hoa Dong district capital), several intelligence, mechanized, and boat platoons, and a headquarters unit. Four new companies have been formed, two of which are undergoing training. About half of the RF recruits are from outside the province, and one and perhaps two of the new companies will be Cao Dai units.

Popular Force personnel present for duty on 30 November numbered 1,116, compared to 1,000 in September of last year. This figure by now probably has grown by about 450 men who were in the training pipeline at the time of the Mission's report. Popular Force members are being recruited as fast as authorization for new units can be obtained.

The number of national police in Go Cong dropped from 130 last September to some 70 at present, because police were sent to Saigon for training and were switched into the Hop Tac program around Saigon. Of the present force, 30 are in the province capital; at least one is assigned in each village undergoing pacification.

The GVN military effort shows encouraging signs of an offensive spirit at all levels. According to American advisers, the sharp decline in Viet Cong incidents is due to 40 or 50 ambushes set every night by GVN forces. Viet Cong losses in personnel and materiel have been running substantially greater than those of the government forces.

The province pacification office now claims 36 percent of the population is in areas of GVN control 38 percent in contest areas, and 26 percent in areas controlled by the Viet Cong. Twenty hamlets were reported to have met the six-point

A-2

pacification criteria on 30 November, as compared to none in September. Five more hamlets were expected to be pacified by the end of 1964. The claims of the local GVN officials are considered too optimistic by US Mission reporters, but it is pointed out that pacification cadres, protected by troops, are now working deep in areas long abandoned.

The pacification effort has been concentrated in the northeastern section of the province. For 1965, the plan is to swing toward the southeast as well as to pacify an area in the center of the province on both sides of Route 24, the most important overland route which runs from the province capital to Hoa Dong and thence to My Tho in Dinh Tuong Province. After that, attention will be turned to the southwest and northwest quadrants of the province. Lao Loi Quan island, site of a Viet Cong stronghold, will be the last region scheduled for pacification.

Go Cong has been relatively unaffected by the political and religious turmoil in the capital. While there have been expressions of concern by provincial officials over the nation's unsettled political situation, there has been no slackening of local efforts. The provincial administrative staff has been relatively unchanged in the past few months and is considered better than average.

Go Cong Province has been in existence only since 1 January 1964, and still faces a large task. Government efforts since last September have been largely unchallenged by the Viet Cong. The lack of Viet Cong activity may be explained partly by aggressive ARVN and paramilitary patrolling which keeps the Viet Cong off balance and reduces the effectiveness of Communist small-unit actions, and partly by the terrain, which makes it difficult for the Viet Cong to mount and support actions by larger units.

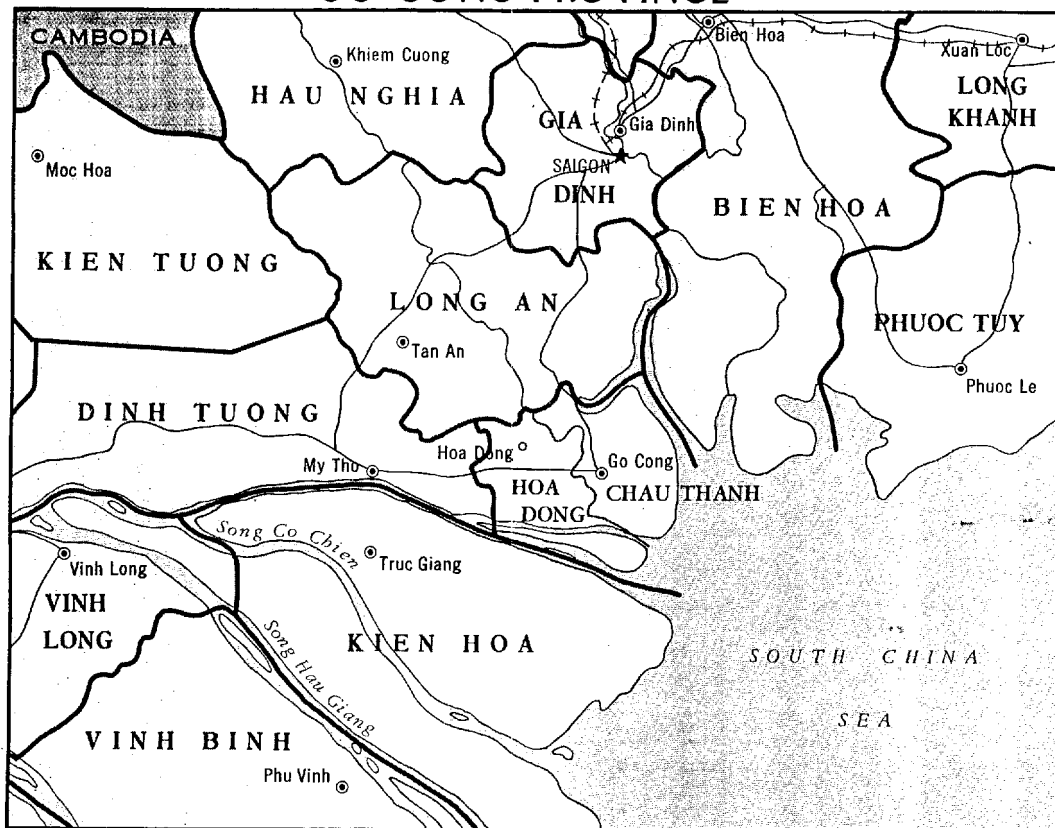
Pacification efforts have not yet convinced the people of Go Cong that the GVN can protect them from the Viet Cong. There is some doubt on the part of some observers on the scene as to whether the clandestine Viet Cong infrastructure has been eliminated from areas that are now being carried as secure. Moreover, these observers doubt that the paramilitary forces can maintain security after ARVN units move out of the pacified zones. With regard to the latter, in at least one instance the paramilitary have--given good intelligence--proved themselves more than a match for Viet Cong local force units.

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SOUTH VIETNAM **GO CONG PROVINCE**



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- Province (Tinh) boundary
- ⊙ Province capital
- District (Quan) boundary
- District headquarters

- Route
- +— Railroad

0 10 20 30 40
STATUTE MILES

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